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“Little America” in Africa: Liberia as a Touchstone for African Americans

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So much apprehension is felt for the future of Liberia as a State in Africa composed of African Colonists. The settlers born and brought up under the individualistic ideas of the West could not understand and hardly yet understand that there is an African Social and Economic System most carefully and elaborately organized, venerable, impregnable, indispensable.

—Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Customs*, 1908

INTRODUCTION

Native peoples in the region called the Republic of Liberia “Little America.”¹ Indeed, from its inception in the early nineteenth century, the country strove to be a real America, a land of opportunity for all that ex-slaves and free blacks bitterly dreamed of but were unable to obtain in the United States. Despite the prevalence of American material culture on the surface, such as “drink Coca Cola” signs even in the remotest villages and children dancing to the music of the “Bandstand USA” radio show, Liberia by the 1960s was a failure, an embarrassment to most Americans of African descent.²

Historians have explored African Americans’ ambivalent attitudes toward Africa, from sheer prejudice and paternalism to pride and solidarity.³ It seems, though, that Liberia is an especially difficult subject for scholars

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delving into trans-Atlantic black connections in the twentieth century. Except for commentaries on rivalry between Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois and criticisms of literary works on the black republic,⁴ scant attention has been paid to the various perceptions in the black community of this miniature of the United States in West Africa.⁵

In this essay, I try to repair this lacuna by examining articles and letters about Liberia that appeared in two of the leading black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News*, from the early twentieth century through the 1960s. The *Defender*, which competed keenly with the *Pittsburgh Courier* for the title of the nation's most circulated newspaper among African Americans, was a driving force behind the Great Migration of Southern blacks to Northern cities. The *Amsterdam News*, the third-largest black newspaper in the North, had on its staff and as writers people who were involved in Garvey's Back to Africa crusade.⁶ The two papers were voices for exodus, and they gradually became forums for other kinds of reforms. Here I attempt to outline the complicated relations between Liberia and the United States from the period of emigration and migration through that of the Civil Rights struggle and to ascertain how Americo-Liberians, who did everything they could to be Americans in Africa, and African Americans, prisoners of the American Dream, both failed to realize an African American dream of fairness and affluence in their respective lands of the free.

HISTORY OF THE DEBT-RIDDEN COUNTRY

Liberia at the turn of the twentieth century was one of only two black republics in the world (the other being Haiti) and one of only two independent black nations in Africa (the other being Ethiopia). As such, it could have been a beacon of hope for those in the African diaspora, but, according to a black New Yorker's recollection, "prior to World War I," the bare mention of the name Liberia to the average African American would surely trigger "a combined raised eyebrow and horse laugh."⁷

Begun as an experiment in 1820 under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, the settlement of Liberia (officially named in 1824) was a retreat for those Americans who "were debarred by law from all the rights and privileges of men" in the South and who were looked down on by "public sentiment, more powerful than law" in the North, as the country's Declaration of Independence stated in 1847. Nominally free blacks in the United States decided "to abandon forever the scenes of [their] childhood,

and to sever the most endeared connexions” so that they could “improve those faculties” in their new sanctuary, “which the God of nature has given [them] in common with the rest of mankind.”⁸

Americo-Liberians, or simply “Americans” as native Africans called them, tried to build a home away from home in the middle of nowhere, with themselves not only as masters of their own lives but also as the masters in the new republic. Alexander Crummell, a New York-born black clergyman who had “returned” from Liberia to the United States in the early 1870s, lamented the situation. “Everywhere on earth,” he said, “men like to hold on to power; like to use their inferiors as tools and instruments; plume and pride themselves as superior beings; look with contempt upon the labouring classes, and strive by every possible means to use them to their own advantage.”⁹ Liberia was no exception. According to Crummell, “you will find the same sentiment among land owners in England; among planters in the West Indies; among manufacturers in New England; among proprietors in the East Indies; will you believe it? Yea, among black emigrants in Liberia surrounded by crude and ignorant pagans.”¹⁰

The *Herrenvolk* democracy that Crummell criticized but Americo-Liberians adhered to, however, did not work. Even with all the manpower they had access to (virtual slaves, so to speak), African Americans in Liberia lacked staple crops to export and sufficient funds to develop the rich natural resources. Given the strained circumstances in Reconstruction-era America, they had no choice but to turn to an imperial power that did not like the idea of a free and independent black nation and that threatened its existence, the United Kingdom. Through the (not so) good offices of a British agent, bankers in London agreed in 1871 to make a loan of \$500,000, but it was somehow “discounted” at 30 percent with 7 percent interest on the original amount, payable three years in advance, which meant the Liberian government had to pay back more than twice what they received. The debt was, after years of negotiations, significantly reduced by the end of the nineteenth century, but the economically insecure country needed two more loans to settle it, one in 1906 of \$500,000, also from London, and the other in 1912 of \$1,700,000 from US, British, French, and German banks. As a result, Liberia lost control of its own finances to the four nations, and customs and other substantial tax revenues were awarded to the advisers and receivers that were appointed by each government. Before long, however, the poorly managed country went broke again, and in 1918 it asked the United States for an advance of \$5 million, which the Wilson administration consented to with severe conditions and which the House of Representatives

approved. But the plan was rejected by the Senate, leaving Liberia desperate for money from anywhere.¹¹

Rescue of a sort came in the form of the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company of Akron, Ohio, which proposed to lend the nation the \$5 million in exchange for lease of one million acres of land for ninety-nine years for eight cents an acre per year. There were worries about continued restrictions on national sovereignty, but Liberia, under duress, accepted the terms in 1926 and repaid its debt to all its creditors, excepting, of course, to Firestone, whose loan would not be liquidated until 1951. Liberia was finally stabilized, with a balanced budget in 1935 during the worldwide Great Depression; the ruling class of the country and the company benefited mutually at the expense of the native population.¹²

AMERICO-LIBERIANS AS RULERS

Men from the interior had always been Liberia's most important export. As early as 1887, the government allowed a French firm to recruit up to five thousand contract laborers and send them to Panama to build a canal; for each one the authorities received a \$2 commission plus administrative fees. The human traffic expanded in the early twentieth century, when European powers needed a stable supply of workers in their African colonies. With the commission more than doubled and a newly instituted license fee (\$250) and a deposit (\$150) per broker, Liberia, the home of liberty, profited from this virtual slave trade in which laborers were abused and exploited.¹³

Firestone needed laborers, too, and thus tried to suppress this human trade and direct the supply to its own rubber plantations. To that effect, and also to divert attention away from the forced labor already in place in Firestone farms to the shipping of "slaves" abroad, the company persuaded the US government to take the matter to the League of Nations, which launched an official investigation in 1930. The final report of the International Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Slavery and Forced Labor in Liberia was a major discomfiture for Americo-Liberians—both the president and the vice-president resigned soon after it came out—and the slave trade and slavery were banned, but the attitude of the rulers toward indigenous Africans remained the same. The so-called savages were regarded as their resources to use at will.¹⁴

African American newcomers to Liberia were also judged by how useful they were to the country. Liberians born in the United States in the nineteenth century and their descendants did not want all black Americans to

follow their path but only welcomed “Americans of color who [were] trained agriculturists, artisans or physicians trained in tropical diseases” or “men trained in business” with capital. The Liberian government had no tolerance for “an undesirable class of persons who [were] as useless here as in America” and vehemently objected to their “country being a dumping ground for any ‘back to Africa’ movement,” preferring the Firestone route for their country to prosper over Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) emigration project.¹⁵

Americo-Liberians also refused to accept black Americans who were likely to overshadow them. Garvey’s plan of resettling blacks from the Americas, who were skilled and experienced in various fields, in the West African nation and helping it develop into a base to fight against colonialism failed, not because it was not workable but precisely because it was. The Liberian elite initially rejoiced at the prospect of economic stimuli but soon turned their backs on the self-proclaimed “provisional president of Africa,” fearing that he would rattle the status quo and become a menace to their dominance.¹⁶ As a UNIA agent, Elie Garcia, wrote to Garvey in August 1920, “the Liberian politicians . . . know that if any number of honest Negroes with brains, energy and experience come to Liberia and are permitted to take part in the ruling of the nation, they will be absorbed and ousted in a very short while.”¹⁷ A year and a half later, the Liberian president obtained a copy of the letter, which confirmed what he feared.¹⁸ The precious Little America the elites created was theirs to rule. Neither uncivilized natives, who outnumbered them by more than a hundred to one, nor arrogant outsiders, however competent, should be allowed to stand on a par with them.

AFRICAN AMERICANS FOR AND AGAINST LIBERIA

Black intellectuals in the United States tended to stand by Americo-Liberians. In a review of George Schuyler’s *Slaves Today* (a fictional work reproaching Liberia), W.E.B. DuBois apologized for “a country, hemmed in as only a small, helpless group of internationally despised people can be.”¹⁹ He continued:

There was only one thing that Liberia had left, and that was her native labor. She could not use it herself because she had no capital. She was beset by England, France and Spain to allow them to use it. . . . She was guilty but she was not nearly as guilty as Spain, Belgium, France

and England. And to picture Liberia as a land of slaves, and say nothing about her background and surroundings, is both unfortunate and untrue.²⁰

The *New York Amsterdam News* concurred, attacking in an editorial the hypocrisy and double standard of Liberia's accusers. There must be "some measure of truth" in the charges "of kidnapping the natives of the interior and selling them into slavery; of wanton reprisals upon those who protested; of bribery and rotten politics; of default of payment of debts . . . and of reprehensible misgovernment." But which among the imperialistic nations of Europe was spotless enough to throw a stone at the victimized republic? "What of the forced labor of black men in the diamond mines of British South Africa? What of the slaughter of recalcitrant natives in the Congo and Niger regions? . . . What of the French refusal to pay the war debt?"²¹ And was the United States any better? "What of the bribery and misgovernment by Tammany in New York and the Thompson machine in Chicago?"²²

Strangely enough, Garvey's followers did not lose faith in the country, even though their plan was defeated and they were ousted. A. M. Wendell Malliet, a Jamaica-born Garveyite and foreign news editor of the *Amsterdam News*, lauded Liberia for its prosperity in the late 1930s, when rubber production was on the rise and newly found iron deposits seemed quite promising.²³ Malliet eulogized Garvey when he died in 1940 and reasserted his belief that Garvey's effort in Liberia was "no pipe-dream."²⁴ Indeed, the plan had not died yet.

Stimulated and supported by black repatriationists (various groups of African American nationalists who had convoluted enmity toward one another), US senator Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi, of all people, introduced what was called the Greater Liberia bill in 1939. Bilbo was a notorious racist and "Mississippi's loudest mouth Negro-hater."²⁵ An avowed Klansman, he wanted to see as many blacks as possible go to their fatherland for what he saw as being to the mutual advantage of both races.²⁶ Repatriation, he averred, citing (correctly) Jefferson and Lincoln, was "the only feasible solution of the race problem."²⁷ Besides, economically, it would "certainly be cheaper and better to care for them in that way than to let them stay in the United States and keep them indefinitely on the relief rolls."²⁸

The proposed legislation would carve out a colony in Liberia and adjoining lands ceded by England and France in return for the United States forgiving those nations their World War I debts. It would help African

Americans who so desired (estimated at five to eight million over a period of twenty-five years) to resettle there, with land and money grants from the federal government (at a cost of \$15 to 20 billion over the next forty years). The new territory would in a few years either be annexed to Liberia or become fully independent.²⁹ World War II, however, changed the political climate in and out of the United States. European allies, busy fighting the Nazis, could not afford to care about black nationalists, who looked unpatriotic in the eyes of the American public. Bilbo stopped pushing the bill, which most thought would never pass the Congress in the first place. He hoped to resume his campaign after the war, but no one took seriously the old Mississippian, who thought of blacks, even those “fighting and dying to preserve and extend American democracy to all, regardless of race, creed, or color,”³⁰ as potential candidates to go “back” to Africa because they could not “obtain security and equal opportunity” in the United States, where, in Bilbo’s view, discrimination and oppression would never go away and “fair” race relations would always be seen as “un-American.”³¹

The repatriation plan and its destination of the repatriates received mixed reviews in the black press both before and after the war. Generally, African Americans had long wanted Liberia to succeed as “a democracy of black men whose power, splendor and achievements [would] melt the race prejudice of the nations.”³² A black bishop from Georgia, who wrote to the *Defender*, advocated emigration to Liberia or Abyssinia of those who would “thrill to the prospect of helping to build” in Africa “a civilization free of prejudice and unjust discrimination based upon color and race.”³³ Some rediscovered an affinity with the West African country; famous dancer Pearl Primus, for instance, found in Liberia “the very roots of the dance” of African Americans.³⁴ Wealthy women of color formed in 1953 the American Friends of Liberia, a nonprofit organization “dedicated to fostering understanding” between the two nations, and its Washington, DC, branch president deplored inaccurate reportage about Liberia, whose “accomplishments show[ed] that it [was] consciously and energetically an outpost of western democracy in Africa.”³⁵ Furthermore, Cold War-era international politics dictated that Liberia be a showcase for the superiority of Western capitalism. As a keeper of “the torch of liberty ever beaming on the African continent,”³⁶ the country would “greatly influence whether the other Negro nations of Africa adopt democracy” or would be “more impressed with what Communist nations claim to be the advantages of their way of life.”³⁷ It is in this context that Liberia, “oriented toward the fundamentals of modern democracy,” outlawed in the late 1950s racial

segregation and discrimination against native Africans, particularly by foreign companies, making it a grave offense “punishable by fines up to \$30,000 and jail terms in some cases.”³⁸

There was, however, as much disparagement and disappointment as praise and optimism directed at the black republic. The most caustic of critics was George S. Schuyler, an African American journalist who drifted from socialism to the John Birch Society with a period in the NAACP in between. After spending three months in Liberia in spring 1931, he published a novel, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia*, which was a round denouncement of the nation’s ruling class, equating them with Southern slaveholders, and which, as mentioned earlier, DuBois disapprovingly critiqued.³⁹ Schuyler kept on attacking Americo-Liberians, labeling them as “lazy, shiftless and unprincipled” and their government as “combining the worst corruptions of American democracy with complete incompetence and barbaric cruelty. . . . Only the lunatic fringe of Garveyite Aframaniacs” could be deluded into the belief that this was “the Black Man’s Land, the haven of colored folk eager to escape white oppression.”⁴⁰ The power structure remained the same for many decades; an observer in the 1950s echoed Schuyler when he said that “the Negro planters of Liberia acquired all the vices of the white planters of the American South, with none of their virtues” and that they “transmitted their wealth and power to their sons and grandsons who did less and less to deserve them.”⁴¹ The rotten country could be saved only through the infusion of “new blood” either from “immigration of American Negroes or [from] the native African population,” both of which groups “the ruling caste succeeded in excluding . . . to Liberia’s great disadvantage and eternal shame.”⁴²

But emigrating from the United States to an unknown “homeland” was not easy. In response to Bilbo’s bill, the *Defender* ran a series of articles and a letter reminding readers of the risks.⁴³ The difficulties loomed increasingly large when African Americans felt more distanced from Africa in the post-World War II affluent United States, knowing “no country and no heritage but America.” “The real paradox of the Negro’s attitude toward Africa,” though, lay not in “his unwillingness to emigrate to that continent” but in the fact that “many Africans who [came] to the U.S. as visitors and students report[ed] downright hostility from Negroes.”⁴⁴ A scholar from Liberia wrote in his reminiscences of his college and graduate school days in Pennsylvania and Michigan in the late 1940s and 1950s that black Americans were “grossly ignorant,” asking him why he did not have a nose ring or if he had a tail.⁴⁵

Africans in the sub-Saharan region began to suspect that these rude “‘brothers’ who . . . balked at being identified with Africans either historically or anthropologically, [might] not be the best allies and friends of the black continent.”⁴⁶ Liberia, which, though skeptical as ever, conditionally accepted as immigrants “American Negroes who [could] make valuable contributions and [were] willing to help advance” the country’s economy,⁴⁷ was reported to be unhappy in the late 1960s “over the prospect of another black colony coming there to settle.”⁴⁸

But Liberia was Little America, so much so that Americo-Liberians actually referred to the United States as “home.” They sent their sons and daughters to “American Negro schools and married them to Americans whenever they could.” In their society, there was an unspoken marriage scale to determine who was preferable. “Girls born and raised in the United States,” a black American in Monrovia testified, were “the highest prestige group.” The second best were “girls born here of parents who came from the United States.” “No president of Liberia,” according to this person, had been “the son of two parents born in Africa; at least one [had] always been American born.”⁴⁹ The statement was an exaggeration—some presidents were born in the West Indies or of West Indian parents—but it was not entirely off the mark. Liberia was “the best model of American democracy and culture on the continent of Africa,” the *Defender* editorialized, and “the one country in the world that [had] shown consistent respect and affection for the American political and intellectual orientation” and thus “deserve[d] encouragement.”⁵⁰

Some African Americans, however, regarded Americo-Liberians and their country as not American enough. Although they “never fail[ed] to rush to America when they need[ed] help and declare[d] their kinship to American Negroes,” an indignant letter from a reader in the *Amsterdam News* stated, they did not show much respect and gratitude for “American Negro missions . . . working in Liberia” for health and education “sent by the United States Government” or “American Negro troops . . . protecting the country.” Instead of “arrogant and greedy” Liberians, African Americans “should go and take Liberia over” and make it “a great monument for Negroes all over the world.”⁵¹ Africa should “be made over in our image,” said black journalist Louis Martin,⁵² through “American intervention and benevolent supervision” if necessary, as George Schuyler had maintained back in the 1930s.⁵³

CONCLUSION

It may seem that African Americans' attitudes toward Liberia have been ambivalent, with high expectations and applause on the one hand and disillusionment and censure on the other. But they are two sides of the same coin. Liberia has always been a caricature of America, which itself, in the words of black poet Langston Hughes, "never was America" to black Americans.⁵⁴ Built by ex-slaves and free people of color from the United States—nine of the country's eleven presidents in the nineteenth century were American born—Liberia struggled to be a Little America without much success, which left African Americans in the United States to choose to see the glass as either half-full or half-empty.

Little America failed not only because it was little but because it was America. Taking the land away from the natives and putting them in forced labor was a survival strategy Americo-Liberians learned from the United States.⁵⁵ The "African Social and Economic System most carefully and elaborately organized" was never appreciated by the Liberian ruling-class, nor even by Garveyites,⁵⁶ let alone by foreign industrialists, as Edward Blyden, the Liberian father of pan-Africanism or Afrocentricity, bemoaned.⁵⁷ It was inevitable that in this American-style dog-eat-dog economy a real American company snatched the fruit of producing and exporting staples. Firestone, with "ridiculously low" wages for workers and unusually generous contracts from the government, made a huge profit over the years but left little money in Liberia.⁵⁸

African Americans who believed in American democracy and free enterprise did not, or could not, have a plan to salvage this wrecked mimicry of America but only encouraged entrepreneurship. In the letter cited above, shockingly titled "We Should Invade Liberia," the writer suggested, in vain, investing the power of black "insurance companies, banks, individual Negroes of wealth, real estate holdings, schools and colleges, great race leaders, and . . . our great newspapers" in Liberia.⁵⁹

Articles and letters concerning Liberia in the black press from the Great Migration through the Civil Rights era reveal that, though fighting a long and hard fight against Jim Crow, blacks in the United States had (almost blind) faith in the fundamental soundness of the American ideal of liberty and the pursuit of happiness (not happiness per se but pursuit of it) and its applicability in Africa. They were unable to come up with a new vision of Liberia, in which, to quote Hughes again, "*every* man is free," yes, free from hunger, poverty, and oppression. It is only natural that, in so-called post-

racial America, these un-African Americans, never questioning the American Creed,⁶⁰ in the same way that Liberians yearn for America even today still have difficulty making the United States just and gentle toward people of color, domestically and internationally.⁶¹ Unless they envision a different future, in lieu of planting imitations of America in Africa or elsewhere, a nightmare of racism and blaming the victim will continue to haunt Americans of any color and cloud their judgment about Africa and the rest of the world.⁶²

The Americo-Liberian regime was overturned in the 1980 coup d'état, which was followed by two bloody civil wars and disorder, with the United States opportunistic and indecisive as to what best to do, not for the Liberian people but for themselves, and with “few African-American leaders . . . stepp[ing] forward to press for aid” and “no Black-owned businesses . . . offer[ing] to help the famine-stricken nation.”⁶³ Liberia, once considered the ultimate solution to the “American dilemma,” providing various groups (white segregationists, black separatists, pan-Africanists, and even civil rights advocates) with unique dreams, continues to be a starting point for rethinking race, nation building, and liberty in Africa and America.

NOTES

¹ George W. Ellis, “Liberia in the Political Psychology of West Africa,” *African Affairs* 12 (October 1912): 52–70.

² “Liberia Seen as ‘Forgotten Relative’ of U.S.,” *Chicago Defender* (hereafter cited as *CD*), October 15, 1962, 6; Harold R. Isaacs, *The New World of Negro Americans* (New York: John Day, 1963), 129–33.

³ James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁴ Tamba E. M'bayo, “W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africanism in Liberia, 1919–1924,” *Historian* 66 (Spring 2004): 19–44; John Cullen Gruesser, *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 56–58, 80–93, 120–34.

⁵ The capital of Liberia, Monrovia, was named after US president James Monroe, the constitution was modeled after that of the United States, the official language is English, and the national flag is a star and stripes. Aaron C. Sleh, “Liberia: Why ‘Little America’ Has Run Its Course,” *New African*, November 14, 2014, <http://newafricanmagazine.com/liberia-little-america-run-course/>.

⁶ Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 135–37, 141–43; Jessie Parkhurst Guzman, Lewis W. Jones, and Woodrow Hall, eds., *Negro Year Book, 1952: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life* (New York: Wm. H. Wise, 1952), 32–35.

⁷ Claude DeMonde Lewis, “Pulse of the Public: Article on Liberia Very Illuminating,” *New York Amsterdam News* (hereafter cited as *NYAN*), November 6, 1954, 16.

⁸ John-Peter Pham, *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State* (New York: Reed Press, 2004), 5–20; Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia*

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37–38, 51–52; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia: A Documentary History of the Constitutions, Laws and Treaties of Liberia from the Earliest Settlements to the Establishment of the Republic* (New York: Central Book Co., 1947), 1: 828–32.

⁹ Alexander Crummell, “The Dignity of Labour; and Its Value to a New People, An Address before the ‘Working Men’s Club,’ Philadelphia, Pa., 1881,” in Crummell, *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield, MA: Willey and Co., 1891), 379–404 (quotation at 386–87).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

¹¹ Charles S. Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: The Story of the Negro Republic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987), 97–109; D. Elwood Dunn, Amos J. Beyan, and Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 215–16; Pham, *Liberia*, 25, 32–37.

¹² Johnson, *Bitter Canaan*, 109–13; Dunn, Beyan, and Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 134–35; Pham, *Liberia*, 37–41; Gabriel L. Dennis, “Liberia To-Day,” *African Affairs* 35 (October 1936): 432–34.

¹³ Pham, *Liberia*, 67–69.

¹⁴ Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 107–26; Pham, *Liberia*, 69–71.

¹⁵ “Walton Says Liberia Offers Opportunities: ‘No Dumping Ground for Back to Africa Movement,’” *CD*, March 26, 1938, 6; Arthur Barclay, “First Inaugural Address, January 4, 1904,” in *The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of Liberia: From Joseph Jenkins Roberts to William Richard Tolbert, Jr., 1848 to 1976*, ed. Joseph Saye Guannu (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1980), 189–208 (quotation at 204).

¹⁶ Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers*, 35–37; M’bayo, “Du Bois, Garvey, and Pan-Africanism,” 39–41.

¹⁷ “A Confidential Report on the True Conditions in Liberia by Commissioner Garcia to Marcus Garvey, August, 1920,” in *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, ed. Amy Jacques-Garvey (1925; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 2: 399–405 (quotation at 399).

¹⁸ Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 9, *Africa for the Africans, June 1921–December 1922* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), lxxiv.

¹⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, review of *Slaves Today*, by George S. Schuyler, *Crisis* 39 (February 1932), in *Book Reviews by W.E.B. DuBois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1977), 161–62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “Confusions in Liberia,” *NYAN*, May 26, 1934, 8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ A. M. Wendell Malliet, “Liberia Advances: Is Definitely Making Way for Herself; Rubber Industry Has Rejuvenated Life of Country,” *NYAN*, August 7, 1937, 11. Earlier, another Garveyite had criticized Firestone, saying that the company’s “entrance into Liberia is . . . a tragedy” and that “Liberia means more than rubber” but is, rather, “Negro life with an idealism, a soul, a culture, a nationalism.” Ulysses S. Poston, “Another Side of Firestone in Liberia,” *NYAN*, March 9, 1927, 20.

²⁴ A. M. Wendell Malliet, “Garvey’s Back-to-Africa Movement No Pipe-Dream,” *NYAN*, August 17, 1940, 9.

²⁵ “Favors Back-to-Africa Plan: Negro Group Backs Bilbo Africa Plan,” *NYAN*, April 22, 1939, 1.

²⁶ “Sen. Bilbo Plans ‘Back to Africa’ Bill,” *CD*, April 22, 1939, 1; Michael W. Fitzgerald, “‘We Have Found a Moses’: Theodore Bilbo, Black Nationalism, and the Greater Liberia Bill

of 1939,” *Journal of Southern History* 63 (May 1997): 293–320; Robert L. Fleegler, “Theodore G. Bilbo and the Decline of Public Racism, 1938–1947,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 68 (Spring 2006): 1–27.

²⁷ Theodore G. Bilbo, “An African Home of Our Negroes,” *Living Age* (June 1940): 327–35 (quotation at 335).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Fitzgerald, “‘We Have Found a Moses,’” 307–8; Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers*, 309–13.

³⁰ “Bilbo Will Press ‘Back to Africa’ Drive for Negroes,” *CD*, February 19, 1944, 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*; “Bilbo Repeats: ‘Send Negroes Back to Africa,’” *CD*, May 19, 1945, 1; Fitzgerald, “‘We Have Found a Moses,’” 314–19.

³² George W. Ellis, “America’s Colony in Africa,” *CD*, April 4, 1914, 4.

³³ W. Y. Bell, “‘Back to Africa’ Movement Lauded,” *CD*, September 11, 1943, 14.

³⁴ “Pearl Primus Says Roots of U.S. Dances Are in Liberia,” *CD*, September 2, 1950, 20.

³⁵ “U.S. Friends of Liberia Give Installation Party,” *NYAN*, June 6, 1953, 8; A. Garland Smyer, “Gunther’s ‘Inside Africa’ Shocks Friends of Liberia,” *NYAN*, November 5, 1955, 10.

³⁶ “Tubman Pledges Liberia to West,” *CD*, August 4, 1956, 10.

³⁷ Edward K. Moss, “Liberia May Determine Fate of East and West,” *CD*, December 24, 1955, 4.

³⁸ “Liberia Outlaws Race Bias,” *CD*, February 20, 1958, 11.

³⁹ George S. Schuyler, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* (New York: Brewer, Warren, and Putnam, 1931).

⁴⁰ George S. Schuyler, “Uncle Sam’s Black Step-Child,” *American Mercury* 29 (June 1933): 147–56 (quotation at 147).

⁴¹ Charles Walker, “Africa Talks Back: More about Liberia,” *NYAN*, October 23, 1954, 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Kelly Miller, “Senator T. G. Bilbo and His ‘Back to Africa’ Proposal,” *CD*, May 20, 1939, 14; E. A. Moffett, “‘Back to Africa’: A Privately Conducted Migration That Ended Disastrously for the Migrants,” *CD*, May 27, 1939, 19; Frank A. Young, “A Back to Africa Movement Failed 22 Years Ago,” *CD*, July 15, 1939, 19; Mabe Kountze, “Should Negroes Return to Africa?,” *CD*, January 13, 1940, 13.

⁴⁴ Lloyd General, “Has the U.S. Negro Any Real Ties to Africa?” *CD*, December 1, 1962, 11.

⁴⁵ Benjamin G. Dennis and Anita K. Dennis, *Slaves to Racism: An Unbroken Chain from America to Liberia* (New York: Algora, 2008), 150–51. Africans often had trouble getting into and studying at American (even black) schools and colleges, where they were “looked upon as either barbarians or ex-barbarians who had become snobbish Europeans.” Isaacs, *New World*, 312.

⁴⁶ “U.S. Negro in Africa,” *CD*, August 24, 1965, 13.

⁴⁷ Charles J. Livingston, “Cleric Sees Unfettered Future for Negro Settlers in Liberia,” *CD*, July 10, 1965, 13.

⁴⁸ Audrey Weaver, “Back to Africa: Fact or Fancy?,” *CD*, April 5, 1969, 14.

⁴⁹ Isaacs, *New World*, 313. This part of the book was reprinted in the *Defender* as the seventh in an eight-part series, “Why Negroes Can’t Go Back to Africa.” Harold R. Isaacs, “Do Africans Insist on White U.S. Envoys?,” *CD*, September 13, 1962, 9.

⁵⁰ “Liberia’s Economy,” *CD*, February 19, 1966, 10.

⁵¹ Henry Fleming, “Declares We Should Invade Liberia and Run It ‘Right,’” *NYAN*, February 16, 1946, 10.

⁵² Louis Martin, “Dope and Data,” *CD*, March 19, 1960, 10.

⁵³ Schuyler, “Black Step-Child,” 156.

⁵⁴ Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again," (first appeared in the July 1936 issue of *Esquire* magazine) in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Knopf, 1994), 189–91.

⁵⁵ The infamous Liberian Frontier Force (regarded as slave hunters and traders) was, in its early years, commanded by US Army officers (former Buffalo Soldiers). Timothy D. Nevin, "The Uncontrollable Force: A Brief History of the Liberian Frontier Force, 1908–1944," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44 (2011): 275–97.

⁵⁶ Although Garvey thought of white civilization as "barbarous" and "savage," what he envisioned was political and economic empowerment for blacks in their fatherland in much the same way as their capitalist and/or imperialist oppressors pursued power in the Americas and Africa. "'Mussolini Gone Mad' Says Garvey," *CD*, October 12, 1935, 24.

⁵⁷ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (1908; repr. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994), 33. Born in the Virgin Islands in 1832, Blyden went to Liberia by way of the United States in 1851 and became an educator and politician, assuming such important posts as principal of Alexander High School in Monrovia, professor and later president of Liberia College, secretary of state, minister of the interior, and ambassador to the Court of St. James. Blyden, especially in his later years, was a rare exception among the Liberian ruling elite in that he believed in African ways to progress. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75–76, 131; Kimberly Welch, "Edward Wilmot Blyden," in *African American National Biography*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2: 40–41.

⁵⁸ "Liberia's Economy."

⁵⁹ Fleming, "Declares We Should Invade."

⁶⁰ Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 148–50.

⁶¹ It is said to be the custom in Liberia, even in the twenty-first century, that "the worst performing students from the worst university in America are preferred over the best performing graduates of the best university in Liberia for the top jobs." Sleh, "'Little America.'"

⁶² African Americans are now advised by a noted black journalist to see Liberia "as an attractive target for investment and development" where "the opportunities are more than ripe and ready." It would "benefit [their] brothers and sisters on the continent of Africa enormously" for Americans of African ancestry to help the country "founded by some of [their] very forbearers" explore oil and other natural resources, build luxury hotels and the like, thus furthering Americanization. Jonathan P. Hicks, "In Liberia, a History and Opportunity for Black Americans," *NYAN*, April 26, 2012, 14. The plan proposed by Hicks, who temporarily lived in Liberia in his childhood and later became a reporter for the *New York Times* and a columnist for the *Amsterdam News*, looks very much like the same old path of foreign investment and development for the rich that got Liberians into trouble in the first place.

⁶³ Wilbert A. Tatum, "Liberia: The Moment of Truth," *NYAN*, August 11, 1990, 31; Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., "Tragedy in Liberia: U.S. Irresponsibility," *NYAN*, August 11, 1990, 13; Carolyn Butts, "Woman Urges American Pols to Assist War-Ravaged Liberia," *NYAN*, April 25, 1992, 2; J. Zamgba Browne, "Liberia: Help Sought of 'Reluctant Godfather,' the U.S.," *NYAN*, July 10, 2003, 2.